

Dr. A . Metzner, c/o

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VERLAG HANDELSBLATT G.M.B.H. · DÜSSELDORF · PRESSEHAUS

Professor Dr. J. Lederberg  
Department of Genetics  
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April 7, 1961

Dr. Me./Co.

Dear Professor Lederberg:

Please excuse my delay in answering your kind letter of March 8. I wish to thank you sincerely for it, and for the permission to use your picture in my work.

Your remarks regarding my quotation from FORTUNE have been very interesting to me, since I have only now found out that there exist two different versions. FORTUNE has brought out the series "Great American Scientists" in book form, and I have taken the quotation "inhospitable to science" from there, while the original article - as you pointed out - reads "insufficiently hospitable to science". Thank you for setting me right. I certainly realize that there is a tremendous difference in meaning between the two wordings.

The last paragraph of your letter has been of great value to me. There lies a lot of truth in these few words when you talk, for instance, of "the futility of an attempt to summarize American culture in a brief word". What you have written in this small paragraph, dear Professor, is the best I have heard or read so far on the subject.

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After all, the situation is the following: During my trips around the world I was told over and over again, especially in the underdeveloped countries, that the Russians perform greater achievements in the scientific field than the Americans. In such cases I had to explain to these people (government officials, executives of industrial development corporations, etc.) that the American society, as you put it, represents a very broad spectrum of interest in scientific and cultural matters, and that, therefore, their research work is spread over many fields, while the Russians are limited to those subjects directed by the Kremlin, e.g. rocket research, etc.

I wish to use this opportunity, dear Professor, to ask you very kindly to write me a few lines on this problem. My question is: "Can the"very broad spectrum in scientific and cultural matters" which we observe in the Western countries and particularly in the US be justified in the long run from a political standpoint, and, if not, which remedies would you advise?"

During my last informative trip through the Sovietunion I read a sentence on a wall in the University of Moscow that I would translate as follows: "Science requires labor and passion". The dean of the chemical faculty accompanying me at that time told me that it was the main duty of the teachers to implant the students this passion for science, and I have, in fact, found the enthusiasm for science among the students with whom I had the chance to talk.

How is the situation in this respect in the United States? We in the Western hemisphere, that means the Americans as well as the people in Western Europe, are accused that our young people in the scientific jobs think in the first place of earning money and consider their profession only as a means to this end. Is it at all possible to express such a generalization? What do you say, dear Professor Lederberg?

I should be extremely grateful to you if you would give me an answer to these questions. It is certainly not curiosity on my part,

but my contacts in East and West have given me a lot to think about, and I should like to hear something on the subject from a competent American.

Hoping to hear from you soon, I remain, dear Professor,

yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'A. Metzner', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right and a vertical line at the end.

(Dr. A. Metzner)